



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 117th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 168

WASHINGTON, TUESDAY, JUNE 14, 2022

No. 101

Senate

The Senate met at 11 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable ALEX PADILLA, a Senator from the State of California.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, help us to so live that the generations to come will know of Your mighty acts.

Today, give our lawmakers the singularity of heart to seek, find, and follow Your will so that their legacy will be exemplary.

Lord, guide them in the path You have created, inspiring them with the potency of your powerful presence.

May they trust You in times of adversity and prosperity, knowing that they will reap a productive harvest if they persevere. Keep them from underestimating the power of Your great Name.

We pray in the Name of our redeemer. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. LEAHY).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, June 14, 2022.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable ALEX PADILLA, a Senator from the State of California, to perform the duties of the Chair.

PATRICK J. LEAHY,
President pro tempore.

Mr. PADILLA thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

HONORING OUR PROMISE TO ADDRESS COMPREHENSIVE TOXICS ACT OF 2021—Resumed

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Also, under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 3967, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3967) to improve health care and benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Tester-Moran amendment No. 5051, in the nature of a substitute.

Schumer amendment No. 5065 (to amendment No. 5051), to add an effective date.

Schumer amendment No. 5076 (to the text proposed to be stricken by amendment No. 5051), to add an effective date.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, as we speak, the U.S. Senate is working on

something not seen since the time we passed the Brady bill I authored nearly three decades ago: a bipartisan effort to draft meaningful gun safety legislation.

For decades, the rhythms of the gun debate in Congress have followed a dispiriting pattern: a mass shooting takes place somewhere in America, innocent people are slaughtered, families grieve and demand action, but gridlock takes over, and nothing—nothing—gets done. This was the cycle of inaction after Sandy Hook, Las Vegas, Orlando, Charleston, Parkland, El Paso, Atlanta, Pittsburgh, and so many others. But after Uvalde and Buffalo, perhaps—perhaps—this time could be different.

To many Senators on both sides, this debate certainly feels different. With Sunday's announcement of a bipartisan framework for gun legislation, we are further down the road to gun safety reform than we have been in a long time.

I spoke with Senators CORNYN and MURPHY this morning, and they updated me on their progress. They are working with the urgency the situation demands, and they are hopeful the legislative text can be finalized in the coming days.

I have assured my colleagues that once we get legislative text to a gun safety bill, I will move to hold a vote on the Senate floor as soon as possible.

I hope that in the very near future, Democrats and Republicans can take the real momentum of the past few weeks and translate it into something that has escaped this Chamber for decades: voting on and passing long-sought gun safety reform.

It is a rare opportunity for the Senate. So in order to reach our goal, we have to keep working with the same urgency and good faith that has carried us this far.

For sure, the bipartisan framework is far from perfect, but if passed, it will unquestionably save lives and would be the most significant action on guns that the Senate has taken in nearly

• This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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three decades. If passed, it would enhance background checks for those under 21. It will help States with their red flag laws, preventing shootings before they happen. It will make it harder for domestic abusers to acquire a weapon by closing the boyfriend loophole.

Significantly, this framework also calls for new punishment for gun traffickers. We all know one of the biggest weaknesses in our country's gun laws as they are today is that anyone can buy a gun in one State and then simply smuggle it into another. We could begin to fight against that with stiffer penalties on gun trafficking.

Of course, this framework will help lower crime and reduce gun violence in our neighborhoods by increasing funding for mental health as well. And even on its own, funding for mental health with great increases in mental health problems that we see after COVID is very much needed.

Taken together, the policies outlined by the bipartisan framework would be an important first step to saving lives. It would lay the foundation for a more sensible approach to gun safety in the future. It certainly is not everything Democrats want, but if we can save even one life—one life—our efforts will have been worth it.

I hope that very soon the Senate can break the cycle of violence, grieving, and gridlock that has held firm for far too long. This is the best chance we have had in years to finally tell the American people that, yes, after the horrifying tragedies of Uvalde and Buffalo, this time—this time—will be different.

We have more work to do so I urge my colleagues not to let this precious opportunity slip away.

H.R. 3967

Mr. President, now on the PACT Act, today, the Senate will continue consideration of the Honoring Our PACT Act—the most ambitious and important expansion of veteran healthcare benefits that we have seen in decades.

Yesterday, we invoked cloture on the substitute amendment to the PACT Act with a very strong bipartisan vote, 78 to 17. Seventy-eight votes, a clear indication that both sides want this bill passed through the Senate. There is no reason to delay that outcome.

Today, we will continue working with our Republican colleagues to see if we can speed up consideration of this legislation. With Republican cooperation, we could be done with the PACT Act as soon as tomorrow.

We need to pass the PACT Act ASAP because our veterans have waited long enough for their healthcare benefits to treat complications from toxic exposure. Over the last two decades, an estimated 3.5 million servicemembers were exposed to dangerous chemicals while in the line of duty while risking their lives for us.

Burn pits were a common method of eliminating all sorts of waste throughout Iraq and Afghanistan, from every-

day trash to hazardous and poisonous materials. After returning home, many veterans developed terrible diseases because of their exposure to these toxic waste dumps. But even so, nearly 80 percent of all disability claims related to burn pits have been denied by the Veterans' Administration. What an indignity. What an injustice. No veteran should ever have to carry the burden of treating complications from toxic exposure alone, and we can change that with this bill.

There is every reason in the world to get the PACT Act done quickly. Both parties want it, our veterans deserve it, and the time is long past for us to make a change at the VA.

OCEAN SHIPPING REFORM ACT

Mr. President, on shipping, last night, finally, the House overwhelmingly approved the Senate's Ocean Shipping Reform Act—the most significant maritime reform law passed by Congress in years.

The inflation-fighting shipping bill now goes to the President's desk for signature, finally providing relief to American exporters and consumers alike.

Shipping reform is exactly the kind of bill that can make a difference to the American people: It fights inflation. It relieves our supply chains. It helps small businesses and consumers alike. Not too much has been written about this bill because, sadly, the way our world and media work, if there is not a big conflict, they don't write much about it. But this is very important.

If high prices are our No. 1 nemesis, one of the main reasons is the ships piled up at our ports. We have all seen the pictures outside the ports of L.A. and Seattle and Savannah and Norfolk and New York, New Jersey. This is causing people to pay more. It is no one's fault. It is COVID-related, and now there is a big rush to make up for the delays that COVID caused.

We have to do something about it, and we have. There are many frustrating reasons why prices are going up right now, but one of the main ones is abuses from ocean carriers.

Over the course of the pandemic—listen to this, folks. Over the course of the pandemic, unfair shipping practices led carriers to increase prices by as much as 1,000 percent—1,000-percent increase in prices in shipping. And who is paying that? The average family in America and the average exporting business.

Even worse, foreign carriers often-times refuse to even transport U.S. goods overseas. And by now we are seeing the results: backlogs at the ports of L.A. and Seattle and Georgia and New York and New Jersey and other major hubs.

This is not just a problem for the coasts. When backlog occurs at the ports in Los Angeles, it hurts farmers in Minnesota or Wisconsin. It hurts truckers and tech companies and manufacturers in mom-and-pop shops all

over the country. And most of all, it hurts American consumers.

Our shipping reform bill will fix this by making it harder for ocean carriers to unreasonably refuse American goods at our ports, while strengthening the Federal Maritime Commission's powers to stop abusive practices by foreign carriers.

I want to thank Speaker PELOSI and my House colleagues who worked to pass this bill. And special thanks goes to Senators KLOBUCHAR and THUNE for authoring the legislation, as well Chairman CANTWELL who used her legislative skills, which are indeed very, very fine. She shepherded the bill through this Chamber. Because of the hard work of these folks, shipping reform will now become law. American consumers will soon feel the benefit.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

CRIME

Mr. MCCONNELL. A few months ago, from this desk, I talked about the results of a recall election in San Francisco. In February, a multilingual, multiethnic coalition in San Francisco stood up for common sense and rejected three members of the far-left school board who had prioritized woke lunacy over the basics of education.

Well, last week, these same fed-up citizens provided a sequel. Even the deep-blue Bay area decided they had had enough—enough—with their radical-left district attorney—a prosecutor in name only—who had become nationally famous for running a soft-on-crime experiment.

As deaths from drug overdoses skyrocketed, his office chose to almost entirely stop prosecuting drug dealing. Burglaries shot up 50 percent. Chain stores had to close locations because of rampant shoplifting. One person who had been arrested five times in 6 months in 2020 was let out every time—every single time—until he killed two women with a stolen car. Liberals actually bragged about how they had cut down incarceration rates, even as disorder swallowed up more and more of the city.

The citizens were fed up—fed up—with being the far-left's guinea pigs. They flocked to the ballot box, and they voted for change.

This phenomenon is not only playing out in San Francisco, it is nationwide—nationwide. For years, the far left has zeroed in on local prosecutors and district attorneys as juicy opportunities to make America radically softer on crime.

According to recent news reports, for example, one far-left billionaire donated more than \$1 million each to the political campaigns of soft-on-crime prosecutors in Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia. According to one group's analysis, the army of soft-on-crime prosecutors supported by this one donor—this one donor—and his networks oversees as much as 20 percent of the Nation's entire population.

Once in office, many of these prosecutors set about abusing their authority by basically unilaterally decriminalizing various crimes that neither voters nor legislators have actually decriminalized in reality. As the attorney general of Virginia put it recently, "Instead of trying to change the law . . . these groups are electing prosecutors who simply ignore it."

As this liberal campaign has been playing out at the State and local level, we have seen violent crime surge all across the country. Here are just a few recent news reports.

From Minnesota: "Robberies, assaults, and gun crimes are causing waves of anxiety and fear among suburban residents across the Twin Cities."

From Colorado: "Since the beginning of the pandemic . . . murders had gone up 47 percent, some types of property crime had nearly doubled, and [the] seizures of fentanyl and methamphetamine had quadrupled" in just the last year.

Atlanta "saw a 30-year record in homicides last year [in 2021]," and 2022 has been looking actually even worse. At least as of a few months ago, both murders and rapes were way ahead of even that 2021 pace.

Residents of Phoenix who try to use public transit to escape soaring gas prices have found out that "assaults and drug crime in and around public transportation have risen over the last five years."

Philadelphia is reporting an 80-percent increase in assaults aboard buses.

In my hometown of Louisville, we are struggling as well. "Over the past several years, violent crime has sharply risen across the city, breaking gruesome records including record homicides and assaults." And we have seen carjacking "more than triple in the [last] five years." Last weekend alone—last weekend alone—Louisville saw 3 homicides and 10 nonfatal shootings. Five teenagers and a 9-year-old were shot during a single altercation at my hometown's Big Four Bridge. Violent criminals turned a popular attraction for families and tourists into a literal war zone.

Stable prices, border security, and public safety are three of the most basic deliverables that any government owes to its citizens—strike one, strike two, and strike three for Democrats at the Federal, State, and local level.

That explains one last headline I will mention this morning: "Americans are more worried about crime than at any other time this century."

UKRAINE

Mr. President, now on a different matter, the latest news from Ukraine confirms that our friends need more robust weaponry, and they need it fast.

"Outgunned Ukraine Needs More Weapons Fast as Russia Advances, Officials Say."

"Ukraine Pleads for Weapons, Saying Russia Has Much More Artillery."

The people of Ukraine have inspired the world with their resilience, but resisting Russian aggression takes reliable supplies of lethal force.

As the Biden administration continues to provide shipments and prod our allies, they must adopt the kind of strong and positive posture that has eluded them at earlier points in the conflict.

As early as last November, I was urging sanctions for deterrence and pushing for NDAA provisions to send enhanced lethal aid last November. Throughout December and January, I urged the President to bolster NATO's eastern flank with more U.S. forces and get more weapons to Ukrainian forces before—before—Russia attacked. In February, I called on President Biden to anticipate Russian manipulation of the energy markets and back off his own holy war against domestic American production. But for months, the Biden administration seemed mute, seemed actually more focused on deterring itself than deterring Putin—too much hesitation, too much hemming and hawing, too little preventive action in advance.

The United States cannot make the same mistakes again with prolonged dithering over whether to provide longer range or more powerful weapons. That is where we are now. It is time to get Ukraine what it needs to finish this fight, including artillery and long-range rockets, and strongly and firmly push our European allies to do the same. The wealthiest European countries need to move fast to do their part—no more hesitation, and quit making excuses.

This war has carried terrible human costs for the Ukrainian people. We cannot bring back the thousands who have been lost, but with strong assistance, we can help Ukraine limit future losses, reduce the risk of greater conflict, and create a deterring precedent for other would-be aggressors, like China.

There is another area where the Ukraine crisis has showcased the need to take decisive action quickly while there is still time. That is with respect to our own defense industrial base and our supplies of critical arms.

Equipping Ukraine has seriously depleted our own stockpiles of Javelins and Stingers. According to the Secretary of the Army, the U.S. military has "taken some risk to our own readiness." This sounds exactly like the sort of situation that prompted the creation of the Defense Production Act, but thus far, we have heard far more from Washington Democrats about using the

DPA to fast-track green energy boondoggles than to expand production capacity for critical weapons and munitions.

Our allies and our partners are interested in buying American military technology. This should be a win-win: allies spending their own money to strengthen themselves by buying American and making our militaries more interoperable in the process. But too often, our partners are hamstrung by American constraints on the process, like the heel-dragging bureaucracy that runs our military sales, and lagging production schedules.

We must adequately stockpile weapons and munitions for our own military and have sufficient supplies and production capacity to arm our friends, and we need to do this before it is too late.

Building up our own stores and upgrading our allies' is the best way we can avoid nightmare scenarios down the road where America could be forced into a terrible choice between committing U.S. troops to a conflict or doing nothing. The remedy is to help our allies upgrade their military capabilities in advance.

Of course, this takes money. All the serious preparations and military modernization that it will take to compete with Russia and China require resources. Tomorrow, the Armed Services Committee will mark up the National Defense Authorization Act. This is a key opportunity to show that both parties are serious about the real growth in defense spending that it will take to keep us on the cutting edge.

The Biden administration's defense budget request was woefully insufficient. The President has proposed a real-dollar cut for defense spending after President Biden's own inflation.

Our colleagues on the committee must help Congress to deliver an NDAA that provides for real, robust growth above inflation so that we can modernize our forces, ensure adequate inventories of critical weapons and munitions, and keep America safe.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

JANUARY 6

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it is hard to believe it was 50 years ago this week—50 years ago—when five men were caught breaking into the offices of the Democratic National Committee here in Washington.

Two years after that, the so-called Watergate break-in and the coverup by the Nixon White House, it brought down the President.

For nearly half a century, the Watergate scandal really ranked as America's greatest constitutional test since

the Civil War—then came January 6, 2021.

An angry mob, summoned by a defeated President, attacked this Capitol building, attacked this Chamber, and those of us who were in it knew it was an attempt to overthrow an election, an election which Donald Trump lost but never admitted.

How did we respond?

Well, the proposal was made—the right proposal—to create a bipartisan commission to investigate what happened on January 6, 2021. Unfortunately, the Republicans, led by Senator MCCONNELL in the Senate, filibustered the creation of an independent commission to investigate January 6. Fortunately, the House went forward to proceed on its own on a bipartisan basis to get to the truth.

Now, after 11 months and 1,000 interviews—more than 1,000—the bipartisan Select Committee to Investigate the January 6 Attack on the U.S. Capitol is sharing its findings with America, and the revelations are so damning.

In its first two public hearings, the committee has shown that the attack on the Capitol was not a demonstration that changed spontaneously and became a riot. The attack on our Nation's Capitol, the attack on this Chamber, was the result of a plan: a violent effort to prevent the peaceful transfer of power from the Trump administration to the Biden administration, to stop the peaceful transition of power in America for the first time in our history.

To quote Congresswoman LIZ CHEENEY, the former President Donald Trump “summoned the mob, assembled the mob, and lit the flame of this attack.”

When the mob beat our police officers and ransacked the Capitol—going through our desks here on the floor, posing for pictures where the Presiding Officer is now sitting, all sorts of things to make them look famous with their friends at the expense of the integrity of this building and this Chamber.

They beat the police officers. Donald Trump did nothing to stop them—nothing. He wouldn't order the National Guard to defend the Capitol, the Senate, the House. He watched the mayhem on TV, rewinding it to watch it over and over again. He gloried in the moment.

When the crowd threatened to hang Vice President Pence, Donald Trump said, “He deserves it.” Deserves it. The Vice President of the United States deserves it.

His own advisers told him repeatedly that the voter fraud conspiracy theories that he was peddling were false. They were called “idiotic,” “amateurish,” “detached from reality.” Who said that? The former Attorney General serving Donald Trump said it in describing the false claims that President Trump continued to pedal.

Donald Trump was told the truth over and over again, and yet he continued to push his deadly Big Lie.

He deliberately—the former President of the United States—deliberately undermined America's faith in our election process to overturn the election and to hold onto power no matter what.

He used the Big Lie to make big bucks. We learned that yesterday—quarter of a million dollars—quarter of a billion dollars in donations, including millions of dollars for an election defense fund that didn't exist.

In a coming hearing, the committee will show how Donald Trump pressured the Justice Department into helping him overturn the election. I know a little bit about that. Our Senate Judiciary Committee, which I chair, documented this attempt to subvert the Justice Department in an 8-month investigation and report that we produced last fall. We produced this report in a bipartisan fashion, inviting Republican and Democratic Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee to witness the testimony of key individuals and to ask questions themselves.

We interviewed former Justice officials like Jeffrey Rosen and Richard Donoghue, the then-acting Attorney General and Deputy Attorney General, who resisted Donald Trump's pressure to take over the Justice Department.

They told us how repeatedly they informed the former President that his bogus election claims were false. They told us how Trump, nevertheless, asked the Justice Department to “Just say the election was corrupt—and leave the rest to me and Republican Congressmen.”

And they resisted Donald Trump's plan to replace Jeffrey Rosen with the Big Lie lawyer Jeffrey Clark, who wanted the Justice Department to help overturn the election.

The facts that the Senate Judiciary Committee uncovered are damning. The January 6 committee will unveil those—many of their own discovery and reporting and some that we sent to them from our testimony that we gathered in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

We came close to losing this democracy in America on January 6. I believe that by laying out the truth for us and for future generations, members of the committee are performing a public service of heroic proportions.

It is sad—sad—that given an opportunity of a bipartisan commission, just as we had with 9/11, that the Senate Republicans stopped it. Why? It is a question they are going to have to answer.

POLITICAL PRISONERS

Mr. President, on another topic, we speak often in the Senate about threats to peace and freedom around the world: Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, China's brutal repression of the Uighurs, the dismantling of democracy in Hong Kong, Nicaragua's repressive dictatorship, and more.

In each of these struggles, there are some brave men and women who are prepared to risk their liberty and their lives to defend democracy and dignity.

Many of them languish in prison as political prisoners. Their captors often try to torment them by telling them: The world has forgotten you; no one knows you are here.

Well, I want to make sure that that doesn't happen by coming to floor of the Senate and sharing some of these stories. Today, let me tell you about a few of them.

Let me start with a Russian opposition leader of remarkable courage: Vladimir Kara-Murza. He was poisoned twice by the Russian spy agency FSB, in 2015 and 2017. He not only survived that, but he continued his work for a democratic Russia.

He was a close friend of Senator John McCain, who asked him personally to serve as a pallbearer at his funeral.

I met Mr. Kara-Murza in March, 3 weeks before Russia invaded Ukraine. He was living in Washington at the time with his wife and three children, and he told me he was going back to Russia. He had work to do.

On April 11, he was arrested in Moscow, 1 day after giving an interview in which he called Vladimir Putin's government a “team of murderers.”

His wife, Evgenia Kara-Murza, also an advocate for democracy in Russia, who I expect to meet with later on this week, said: “He's doing as well as you can do in a Russian prison that is notorious for torture, humiliation, and mistreatment.”

Earlier this month, the Senate unanimously passed a resolution I led with Senator MARCO RUBIO, calling on Russia to release Vladimir Kara-Murza immediately, along with Alexei Navalny, another Russian opposition leader, and thousands of others—Russians jailed for speaking up against repression, for even mentioning the possibility of the murderous war in Ukraine.

It is time for America to stand up for Mr. Kara-Murza and those like him who have shown extraordinary courage.

Senator Leila DeLima is a leading human rights advocate in the Philippines. She is a state senator who just passed her fifth year in jail.

Here she is in her cell.

Why is she in prison for 5 years? She criticized the repressive regime of President Rodrigo Duterte.

From time to time, she writes to me from her prison cell. Let me share a short excerpt of a recent letter:

Warm greetings from my detention headquarters . . . I do not know for how long I will remain behind bars but there is one thing that I am sure of—my will to fight for what is right continues to be undeterred.

Recently, two key witnesses in the sham case against Senator DeLima recanted their testimony, proving what we already know: The case against her is contrived. It is a travesty of justice.

Many Filipino Americans in Illinois tell me they are deeply concerned about the accountability and democracy and its prospects in the Philippines.

The incoming Marcos regime can demonstrate its commitment to a democratic Philippines by ending the harassment of journalists and making Senator DeLima's release one of its first priorities.

Let me now turn to Saudi Arabia—timely.

I have been troubled by the human rights record of this Kingdom, including the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, for which there is no real accountability yet.

This year brought a bit of welcome news. Writer Raif Badawi was finally freed from prison after completing a 10-year prison sentence for dubious charges about his peaceful writings.

I hope that the Saudis will allow Raif the dignity of reuniting with his brave wife, Ensaf Haidar, who I met in Washington, and their three children, now living in Canada.

Badawi's lawyer, Waleed Abu al-Khair, a leading human rights defender, is still in prison. He was convicted in Saudi Arabia's Specialized Criminal Court, usually reserved for terrorists.

I appeal to the Saudi Government to free Waleed and to allow Raif to be reunited with his family.

These gestures would be particularly notable in light of President Biden's upcoming visit.

Finally, let me turn to the United Arab Emirates.

This is Ahmed Mansoor, one of the last major human rights voices in the Emirates.

He was arrested in 2017 for using blog posts to advocate for reform and human rights in his nation. He was convicted of charges of threatening the UAE's state security and social harmony, they sentenced him to 10 years in prison. He has been there for more than 5, at times, in solitary confinement, isolated from other prisoners, no contact with his family. He has reportedly been tortured.

Despite the dismal conditions of his incarceration, he remains steadfast in his commitment to human rights. He has conducted multiple hunger strikes to protest prison conditions.

I appeal to the United Arab Emirates' new President, Muhammad bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, to take this opportunity early in his Presidency to demonstrate compassion and courage by releasing Mr. Mansoor.

America's strength around the world comes not only from our military and economic might but from the power of our values. Over the years, I have heard from many political prisoners. They tell me the support this body, of Congress, of America, and so many others in our government sustained them through the lonely, desperate times they spent in jail for days and weeks and months and years.

I will close with the words of Vladimir Kara-Murza. This is from a recent op-ed he wrote for the Washington Post from his Russian prison. He wrote:

The prisoner's worst nightmare is the thought of being forgotten . . . I always

knew how true those words were—and how important were international campaigns of solidarity with prisoners of conscience. I now feel it with my own skin.

To Vladimir Kara-Murza, Raif Badawi, Waleed Abulkhair, Senator Leila de Lima, and Ahmed Mansoor, I say: You are not forgotten, and we will continue to advocate for your freedom.

Let me also close by acknowledging that a member of my staff, Chris Homan, has really inspired me to take on this cause, and he works at it diligently—our reward, an occasional political prisoner makes it here to my office here in Washington. One of them from Africa presented me with basically a baton that he had made while in prison with my name on it because he heard that I remembered him and spoke of him on the floor of the Senate.

I would say to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle: Make this part of your responsibility as a U.S. Senator. Find these people, these heroes who are sadly wasting away in prison and remember them on this floor. It can make a difference. Some will be released; all will remember the fact that you stood up for them at a time of great need.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

INFLATION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, the latest inflation numbers came out on Friday, and it has become par for the course in the Biden economy that they weren't pretty.

Inflation hit 8.6 percent in May, the worst inflation since December of 1981. Grocery prices increased nearly 12 percent on average. Eggs were up 32 percent; chicken was up 17 percent; milk was up 15 percent; and the list goes on and on.

Gas prices were up 48 percent. Since President Biden took office, the price of gas has more than doubled. Gas is at \$5 a gallon, and the price of diesel, so essential to our Nation's farmers and ranchers, is even worse. The problem is, there is no end in sight. JPMorgan estimates that gas prices could exceed \$6 a gallon by August. Other energy costs have also increased with electricity up 12 percent and utility gas service up 30 percent.

By one estimate, inflation is costing American households \$460 per month. That is right: \$460 per month. It is no surprise that in a recent poll, 83 percent of respondents—83 percent—describe the state of the economy as "poor" or "not so good" or that just 27 percent said they have a good chance of improving their standard of living.

President Biden likes to talk about creating "an economy that works for working families." Well, I have news for the President. This economy is not working for working families. Working families can't absorb an additional \$460 a month. They have to cut back. They have to put off needed car repairs or eliminate a family vacation or cut down on milk for their kids. The Presi-

dent said the other day that "[the economy] is strong as can be but for inflation, but for gas and food."

But for gas and food? Well, I have to tell you, gas and food prices are two pretty essential economic measures for families.

Moms and dads wondering how they can afford to fill up their cars to get to work or get their kids to baseball practice don't care how good the President says the economy is when the price of a tank of gas has more than doubled since the President took office.

I guess we can at least be glad the Democrats and the President have finally started acknowledging our inflation crisis. For months last year, as inflation climbed, the administration dismissed those concerns. Even as it became more and more clear that we had a long-term problem on our hands, the President and congressional Democrats spent their time focusing not on solutions to our inflation crisis but on a massive spending spree almost guaranteed to make our inflation problem worse.

That is right. Let's remember how we got here. When President Biden took office, inflation was at 1.4 percent, well within the Fed's target inflation rate of 2 percent. And it might have stayed there had Democrats not decided to pass a massive and partisan \$1.9 trillion spending spree under the guise of COVID relief mere weeks after the Congress had passed a fifth bipartisan COVID bill that met essentially all current pressing COVID needs.

The Democrats' so-called American Rescue Plan sent a lot of unnecessary government money into the economy, and the economy overheated as a result.

And you don't have to take my word for it.

Here is what one Democratic economist who worked in the Obama administration had to say on the subject:

The \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan passed in the early days of the Biden administration will go down in history as an extraordinary policy mistake.

Let me just repeat that.

The \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan passed in the early days of the Biden administration will go down in history as an extraordinary policy mistake.

That is a direct quote from a Democratic economist who worked in the Obama administration.

Democrats were warned that the American Rescue Plan ran the risk of overstimulating the economy, but they went ahead anyway. What is almost worse was their subsequent decision to pursue another massive spending spree, their so-called Build Back Better plan, even after it had become clear that their first spending spree had helped plunge our economy into a serious inflationary crisis.

Even now—even now—as Americans deal with the worst inflation in decades, it is looking like Democrats are trying to revive elements of their Build Back Better plan and use reconciliation rules to pass yet another partisan spending spree. It is the triumph

of Big Government ideology over economic reality. If Democrats succeed in passing another partisan spending spree using reconciliation rules, Americans' economic situation is going to get even worse.

Unfortunately, there is no easy solution to the Democrats' largely self-inflicted inflation crisis, but the first priority is to do no more harm. That means no more partisan spending sprees like the Democrats' Build Back Better plan.

Another big priority should be unleashing American energy production—in particular, the domestic production of oil and gas—to ease energy prices. High gas and energy prices fuel higher consumer prices across the board—no question about it. Unleashing American energy production would not only help reduce the price of gas, but it could also help rein in prices for other commodities. Unfortunately, the President has demonstrated a clear hostility to conventional energy production, which is discouraging investment in American energy and prolonging the current gas price situation.

Another thing we should be doing to help make life easier for consumers is trying to ease supply chain woes whether that involves removing burdensome trucking regulations or passing legislation like my Ocean Shipping Reform Act.

I am pleased that both Democrats and Republicans have come together to support my bipartisan bill, which I introduced, along with Senator KLOBUCHAR, earlier this year. I am particularly grateful to my fellow South Dakotan, Representative DUSTY JOHNSON, who helped usher this legislation through the House of Representatives.

The Ocean Shipping Reform Act would help ease supply chain pressures by addressing unfair ocean carrier practices, speeding up the resolution of detention and demurrage disputes, and improving the movement of goods at our Nation's ports. It won't solve our Nation's inflation crisis, but it should help make life easier for U.S. exporters, importers, and consumers alike.

I am very pleased that this legislation passed the House of Representatives yesterday and that it will soon be on its way to the President's desk, and I hope that we will be able to pursue more bipartisan propositions to help make life easier for American families.

Democrats' big-spending, Big Government agenda has resulted in a lot of pain for working families. If President Biden and Democrats really want to make life better for ordinary Americans, they will decisively reject any further spending sprees and work with Republicans to do what we can to alleviate the inflation crisis the Democrats have helped create.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Iowa.

(The remarks of Mr. GRASSLEY pertaining to the introduction of S. 4393

are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. GRASSLEY. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJÁN). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to complete my remarks before the Senate adjourns for the lunch hour.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I want to report that we are making serious progress in our bipartisan effort to respond to the shooting in Uvalde, TX, and other places around the country. Over the last few weeks, I have been working, in particular, with Senator MURPHY, Senator SINEMA, and Senator TILLIS on mental health and school safety reforms, and we have narrowed the scope of our discussions to provisions that we believe can earn broad bipartisan support in the Senate, and a number of our colleagues on both sides have joined the discussion.

Over the weekend, we announced an agreement on principles for bipartisan legislation, 20 Senators—10 Republicans and 10 Democrats. This included a range of targeted reforms to keep our children and our communities safe, from mental health resources to funding to harden schools and make them more safe. No parent should have to send their child to school wondering whether they are going to be safe at school, and certainly no student should be afraid to go to school for fear of their safety.

We also included a number of targeted measures to prevent violence by people committing crimes and other dangerous individuals. I am proud of the work we have done so far, but, of course, we are not at the finish line. We are still at the beginning when it comes to drafting appropriate text.

Our agreement is based on principles alone. And translating this proposal into legislative language is no easy task, as Members of the Senate understand. Here is an example of the many details that need to be ironed out: One of the big pieces of this bill relates to State crisis intervention programs and initiatives.

The idea here is pretty simple: Support programs that reduce violence, protect the public, and help individuals in crisis get the help they need. But there are a number of different ways this provision could be drafted, and I am committed to ensuring that we get it done right.

But I want to be clear because there has been a lot of misinformation, misunderstanding on this point. None of

what we are proposing would create a national red flag law—no national red flag law. Some have mischaracterized this provision as an incentive for States to pass a red flag law, but that is something I am aiming to avoid. I trust the States to make their own decisions, and 16 States have decided to pass red flag laws. But that is fewer than half of the States with red flag laws on the books. Congress should not only send Federal funding to those States but also other States that are doing things to deal with people in crisis. And as the agreement, in principle, said, what we are focused on is crisis intervention.

But there are a number of different ways that this could be approached. And I am fighting for this proposal to include a grant program that gives every State, regardless of whether it has a red flag law or not, funding to administer programs that they do have that will reduce violence, increase public safety, and make sure that individuals in crisis get the help that they need.

There should be no requirement for States that do not currently have a red flag law to pass one. The existence or lack of a red flag law should not impact on any States' ability to receive funds for crisis intervention. And if a State does want to use this money to implement a red flag law, they should not be able to do so unless their red flag law contains a full set of due process and Bill of Rights protections in the Constitution.

So how can States without red flag laws use this money? Well, there are a range of evidence-based programs that support our shared goal, which is, in fact, to keep communities safe and to save lives. One great example is the assisted outpatient treatment programs. These are sometimes just called AOTs. These programs allow courts to order people with serious mental illness to receive outpatient treatment as a condition of living in the community. AOTs can be life changing for people who struggle to maintain consistent mental health treatment.

Programs vary from State to State but typically include medication, along with a variety of other services including counseling. AOTs rely on evidence-based treatment plans to help individuals live healthier, safer lives, and they have a successful track record. Assisted outpatient treatment programs are effective in reducing arrests and incarceration, violent mental crises, and hospital stays and homelessness. I think this is another way that States without red flag laws might be able to use the funding that we would provide under the provisions of this bill. At least that is what I am hoping we ultimately will land on.

I think it would be kind of strange if we passed a national law that said only 16 States were going to be eligible for this money and you would only be eligible for it if you passed a red flag law.

I think that would almost be like trying to commandeer the States' legislature and government and force them to accept something they decided not to do but because maybe they tried to do something a little bit differently, like assisted outpatient treatment, mental health courts, which have been very successful in my State and veterans courts, in particular, to focus on our veterans community who has particular challenges.

While I am talking about assisted outpatient treatment, 47 States actually have those laws, and I would like the money that would be available under this fund for crisis intervention to be able to be used for that. Again, I don't support any prescriptive mandates or national mandates at all, including a national red flag. Each State should be able to make their own choices and use its share of funding in the best way it sees fit to protect the constitutional rights of somebody who is in mental health crisis or to provide other resources, like assisted outpatient treatment or mental health court adjudications or veterans courts hearings, in order to help them address their challenges.

The great thing about the design of our country is that we have a national government, but we have sovereign States. Louis Brandeis once called them the laboratories of democracy. And, actually, it makes plenty of sense to me that we learned from the experience of the States that have passed red flag laws and States that have passed other types of ways to address people requiring crisis intervention. This provides the ability to innovate and to try new ideas and to come up with best practices that the Federal Government simply cannot do when you are considering legislating for a country of 330 million people.

So I personally do not support an overly prescriptive grant program that favors only a few States over all 50 States. And, of course, I won't support any grant program that violates the Constitution or the requirement of due process of law when it comes to a constitutional right like the Second Amendment.

So I do believe there are a range of options to improve public safety, and the States should have the funding and flexibility to invest in programs that they think best delivers the result—to save lives, to help people in crisis. And that is really what we are trying to do with this legislation.

So the details are still being worked out. And we are drafting legislative text, and, of course, that is sometimes hard. Sometimes, I found that people use the same word, and they mean something different by it, or they come to it with a sort of context that maybe isn't apparent from a conversation about principles. And that is why going from the principles that 20 of us have agreed on into legislative text that we can then vote on and pass is a challenge.

We know that on a sensitive topic like this, a single word or the placement of a comma can make the difference between protecting and infringing on rights. So I am laser-focused on drafting text that reflects the common-sense, targeted proposal that we have agreed to in principle. Again, we are working through the details, and I hope we will have legislative text later this week. But I am not willing to rush it for the sake of speed.

I spoke with Senator SCHUMER, the majority leader, this morning, and he said he would like to have this bill ready to vote on next week. And I am certainly with him in terms of that aspirational goal. That means we are going to have to complete our work on the text by the end of this week so Senator SCHUMER will have that legislation available to take up next week.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Thank you, Senator CORNYN, for the work you are doing and working with Senator MURPHY and so many other Senators. You and I have done so many bills together, including the historic Save Our Stages bill, which made such a difference. And I am very pleased that we are finally advancing gun safety legislation. And a lot of these provisions are things that we have been working across the aisle on for many years, the boyfriend loophole—something that I introduced in 2013, 10 years ago—to close the boyfriend loophole. That is a part of this negotiation, part of the framework. We have so many women killed, 1 every 14 hours, from domestic partners—1 every 14 hours from domestic partners—with guns in this country. And, sadly, half of those involve dating partners, people who aren't married to someone, but they are in a romantic relationship with them in some way. And the way the law works in all but 19 States where it is fully closed, in many of these States, you get convicted of domestic abuse, and you can still go out and buy a gun the next day.

So I am really pleased that we are moving forward on this provision. This isn't the first time we have heard the call to action from America when it comes to guns. We heard it after 23 people were killed at a Walmart in El Paso; after 17 people were killed at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland; after 59 people were killed at a country music festival, just out there on a beautiful evening enjoying the music; after 59 people dead in Las Vegas; and after 49 people were killed at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando.

Today, we hear calls for action because of more tragedies: a White supremacist murdering 10 people who are simply shopping for groceries; one guy out buying a cake for his little boy, a birthday cake for his son, who never returned; 10 people killed.

The American people are demanding that we do something after the sense-

less murder of 19 children and 2 teachers who died putting their very lives up to protect those children in Uvalde, TX. We have seen the pictures of those kids in their confirmation-communion dresses, in their sports uniforms, the Converse green sneakers, the glasses, the smiles. In some photos, they were actually holding awards they had won just that morning.

But today, after too many of these tragedies to name, I rise with renewed hope that we are finally working together to help keep Americans safe from gun violence. While there is so much more work to be done, reforms outlined in the bipartisan framework, like encouraging States to enact risk protection orders, which are also known as red flag laws, expanding access to mental health services, and supporting school violence prevention—Senator GRASSLEY and I led that bill after Parkland that we passed with significant funding for schools. Clearly, more must be done.

As I noted, I am particularly pleased to see that the framework will include my bill to finally close the boyfriend loophole. Every year, more than 600 American women are shot to death by intimate partners. We understandably focus on the horror of these mass shootings, but think of those numbers: 600 women shot every year by intimate partners.

We know that preventing convicted domestic abusers from getting guns saves lives. We know that because we have seen the numbers in the States that have the laws in place.

Currently, Federal law only prohibits domestic abusers from buying a gun if they are currently or formerly married—think about that: currently or formerly married—or if they have ever lived together or if they have a child. That is despite the fact, as I noted, that half of these homicides—half of the women killed are killed by dating partners. That is why in 2013 I introduced this bill to close this dangerous loophole, and now, I am so pleased that there is growing bipartisan support for the bill.

By the way, we have shown that support in the past. It was part of the Violence Against Women Act that passed in the House, and it had 29 Republicans vote for it. That included an even more broad version of the bill, which also included stalking and was broader than what we are going to see in this bill.

Obviously, I support my original bill, but the fact that we are making progress to close the loophole in the States that so far have not gotten to where the other 19 are is incredibly positive. It did not pass last time when we passed the Violence Against Women Act in the Senate. Sadly, it didn't make it in there. But, again, it got 29 Republican votes in the House, and that just shows the kind of growing momentum we have for this.

I come from a State with a proud tradition of hunting and fishing, like yours. I always think about my Uncle

Dick and his deer stand, and I always ask, when I look at these proposals—from closing the boyfriend loophole to putting in better background checks, to doing something about better checking the records of 18- to 21 year olds—I think, does that hurt my Uncle Dick and his deer stand? Of course, the answer is, it does not.

This is our moment to act. It is not just one killing, and we all know that. It has happened in every single community. Every single Senator in this Chamber knows of a moment where they thought “How could this happen in my community?” when they meet with a family.

What I remember the most, actually, is a case involving a police officer out of Lake City, MN. He was a good cop doing his job. He was called to a domestic violence incident.

What people don’t often know is that for police officers, these domestic violence calls can be some of the most dangerous because you have someone who is very angry, and you don’t know what you are walking into. It is in the moment.

He gets there to the door. He has his bulletproof vest on, but the perpetrator—clearly mentally ill—who had been beating up his young, young, young girlfriend, meets him with a gun, shoots him in his head, and he dies.

I was there for that funeral. There was an outpouring of support from the community. The funeral was held in the very same church where the officer and his wife and their three little kids had gathered for the nativity play just a few weeks before for Christmas, those two little boys and a little girl. The father had sat in the front row to watch his boys in that nativity play only a few weeks before, and the next time the family is in that church, it is the widow, the two little boys, and this little tiny girl in a dress with blue stars on it walking down the aisle of that church at his funeral. That is a moment I won’t forget.

I just shows you how domestic abuse and those kinds of cases—yes, there is one immediate victim—most likely the woman—but it is a whole family who is the victim. Kids who witness domestic abuse through their lives are so much more likely to get into crime themselves. Statistics have shown it. But it is even more than the family, it is the whole community, as that family who lost their dad and lost their husband would tell you if they were standing in here right now.

So I am so pleased we are finally moving on this. I thank Senator MURPHY. I thank Senator CORNYN and all those involved. I am also so grateful that my 10 years of work leading this bill with Representative DEBBIE DINGELL in the House has not gone for naught. We kept it moving. It is probably a sign for anyone that perseverance matters in this place. I am very pleased that it is part of the final negotiations, and it will make such a difference for saving lives.

I yield the floor.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:52 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. SINEMA).

HONORING OUR PROMISE TO ADDRESS COMPREHENSIVE TOXICS ACT OF 2021—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

TRIBUTE TO TED LEHMAN

Mr. TILLIS. Madam President, I come to the floor today to sadly announce the retirement—or not retirement—my chief of staff’s decision to move on to another great opportunity, and I wanted to take a few minutes to talk about Ted Lehman and not only the 5 years he has been my chief of staff but the nearly 20 years he has been working in the Senate.

Before I start, though, he attended the University of Pennsylvania, where he got his undergrad, and then he went to Georgetown to get his law degree. He clerked for Thomas Hogan, who was then the chief judge of the DC District Court.

He came to the Senate about 20 years ago, in 2002. To give you some perspective, I didn’t enter the legislature in North Carolina until 2007, so he has years of experience on me. He has knowledge of the Senate that I will never gain.

He started work with Senator Hatch. He worked for a couple of years with Senator Sessions, and then he worked for Senator GRASSLEY on the Judiciary Committee. He was the chief counsel of nominations and senior counsel for the Senate Judiciary Committee, and that is where I met Ted.

I remember vividly, when my chief of staff at the time, Ray Starling, told me that he was going to be moving back to North Carolina, I told him: Great. Now find your replacement.

It was later that day that he came to me and said: What about Ted Lehman?

I said: I think that is a fantastic idea.

Ted wasn’t looking for a job, and I wondered whether or not he would be interested in working for a freshman Senator from the State of North Carolina. But he took that job, and he has done extraordinary work, not only in terms of the day-to-day institutional grind that a chief has to go through but his attention to staff—not only the DC staff but the North Carolina staff. I think he is well-regarded among the staff, and he is going to be sorely missed.

I also need to talk about Ted and his family. To say that it is in the Lehman blood is an understatement. His brother Dirksen served on the HELP Com-

mittee with Senator Jeffords. His brother Patrick is the legislative director to Senator SASSE. He knows a lot about this institution, and he knows a lot about its processes. The first, really, opportunity I got to see that in action was when he was responsible for moving Justice Gorsuch through the nominations process.

Ted has a great family—his wife Amy, his son Jackson, his oldest son, his oldest daughter, Emma Claire, Sallye, and a young son now. Now, Ted is not from North Carolina, and we have speculated as to why he named his son what he did. He may say it is related to some sort of family tradition, but I think it is no coincidence that he named his son “Raleigh” after our State’s capitol.

Ted is an avid hunter, fisher, outdoorsman, baseball dad, soccer dad—all those sorts of things—and he gets the right balance. He understands that family is as important as work, and he figures out how to strike that balance. But there is very seldom a morning where he is not one of the first people in, and there are so many nights where I am the last person he sees before he goes home.

I appreciate his service. I am going to miss him.

Thank you, Ted.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

H.R. 3967

Mr. REED. Madam President, I rise today in support of the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promises to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act, also known as the Honoring our PACT Act.

Our Nation asks a great deal of our servicemembers and their families. We ask them to be ready to fight and to win against a wide range of security challenges across the globe. Our Armed Forces know and understand the threats they may face on the battlefield. Unfortunately, servicemembers also face threats that aren’t as apparent—exposure to toxic materials. These exposures can result in rare and sometimes fatal medical conditions.

From exposure to Agent Orange to radiation from nuclear tests, veterans have carried an extra burden because of their service. It has too often been a struggle to recognize and address those impacts.

Now, a new generation is dealing with the long-term effects of toxic exposure. Indeed, during their service, up to 3½ million veterans have been exposed to toxic burn pits. As the name implies, burn pits are pits where all forms of waste, including toxic waste, are disposed of by burning. Our servicemembers lived and worked in close proximity to these burn pits, often without knowing the potential consequences to their long-term health or any way to avoid it.

Since 2009, the Department of Defense has recognized the harm burn